

## Eden and the Promised Land

The description of the Garden of Eden in Genesis and that of the promised land in Exodus are given to us as ideal visions. They are places which have a kind of visionary perfection and abundance, so that Eden is full of "every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Gen 2: 9) and the promised land is "a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex 3:8). These are places where human beings will not know hunger or deprivation and where life will be easy to sustain.



Against this picture, is the reality of human life. Ejected from Eden, entropy kicks in, and Adam and Eve have to sweat and toil to live. Farming means breaking hard soil and fighting off weeds and weather. Childbearing and rearing is painful and hard, but nonetheless, human endeavour does prevail. Similarly the promised land is not just there for the taking, but requires wandering about trying to keep a society together, learning how to live (or not) alongside some very unfriendly neighbours and earning a living from a wilderness.

The vision of perfection, the place of rest and refreshment where the living is easy is often what makes a difference to the toil and trouble. For many of us it might be a well-earned holiday after months of late nights in the office; for others, it might be seeing the children settled, or it might be the

eventual hope of a peaceful retirement, for yet others the hope of heaven. The light at the end of tunnel keeps us going.

Yet we also learn that we could very easily lose heart were it not for God. For the vision of a time when all is well, can seem mythical and dreamlike when it seems that there is no respite and we can't keep the harshness of life from catching up with us. Indeed, Moses dies before reaching the promised land. For some of us, this is also true.

What the Bible tells us clearly is that God has *already* made the vision a reality. This is not to be done when we've earned enough points, or somehow suffered enough. Eden is created and human kind placed within it. The promised land is a real promise to be fulfilled, not an empty promise. Here then is our Christian hope that life has value, purpose and meaning. We *will* walk in the garden. We *will* cross the Jordan.